Bible Characters – Jesus Christ

(Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)

As we come to a close in the Bible character series, we turn to the most important One now, namely Jesus Christ. Reading about Jesus' life and works, His miracles and His ministry may at times be misread or misinterpreted as coming from a person, who simply does good works and supplies insightful teaching. However, that is not the case here, since Christ's life does not end at death – He is resurrected through the Holy Spirit on the third day. This prompts us to consider and reflect who Jesus is and why He came.

Even before His conception, God sends the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary – announcing to her the event of the incarnation – that is Jesus being conceived by the Holy Spirit, thereby being born without sin – that is the absence of the fallen sin nature all other people have, as a result of Adam's rebellion against God in Eden. The angel explains God's plan and purpose to Mary:

"'Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.'" (Luke 1:30-35 NLT).

So here we have the identity of Christ revealed, namely that Jesus is the Messiah (His name comes from the Greek rendering of 'Joshua' meaning 'Yahweh [the Lord] saves'). This is also revealed to Mary's betrothed, Joseph, to whom an angel reveals that Mary, having conceived: "'… will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'" (Matthew 1:21 NLT). As such we discover here as the Bible reveals to us, that Jesus is indeed 'God in the Flesh.'

This brings us to the reason for Christ's coming – which is to save mankind, atoning for the sins of all people (past, present and future) – by offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice acceptable to God on the cross, bearing God's wrath upon sinful people, a daunting task, since Jesus cries out in a derelict voice "'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?'" (Mark 15:34). Jesus is the only One, who can and accomplishes this task on our behalf, when He affirms "'It is finished!'" (John 19:30 NLT). The event of the resurrection affirms Jesus as the Messiah and is witnessed by many (John 20:11-29; Luke 24:13-49; John 21; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8). The bottom line is that we understand how Jesus is interested in a repentant heart – bent towards Him in obedience and surrender. Then and only then, are we able to fulfill our God-given Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

To sum up, as we read about Jesus' life as recorded in the Gospels, we understand that He has come as 'God in the Flesh' to atone for our sins. He also defeated sin, Satan, death and evil for

all eternity. Yet, later He does send the promised Holy Spirit to help us live in the here and now (Acts 2) until His Second Coming on 'Judgement Day' when He consummates His eternal kingdom. So what is our part in all this? The apostle Peter later explains: "'Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away — all who have been called by the Lord our God.'" (Acts 2:38-39 NLT).

As a result, there is only one single question Jesus asks that truly matters, and that is: "But who do you say I am?" (Mark 8:29). The answer to this question is the most important any of us can make, since it establishes the difference for our present state and our eternal destination. May we affirm Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and embrace Him, repentantly and obediently, as our personal Lord and Savior following His call: "'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.'" (Matthew 11:28-30 NLT).

For further study:

Gardner P. *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Characters: The Complete Who's Who in the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

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